

# The Texas Lawbook

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## Joe Jamail Endowment for Veterans Legal Aid Hits \$1M

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The stories about Joe Jamail, one of the most successful and flamboyant trial lawyers in U.S. history, are legendary.

There was that time in 2013, for example, when Jamail spoke at a corporate executives conference at Stanford University and a Silicon Valley company official asked the Houston trial lawyer if he agreed that there are too many lawyers in America today.

“If you are talking about lawyers who are paper pushers, you are damn right there are,” he said. “But as long as there are bastard executives like you people who are stealing from each other and screwing each other over, you need more lawyers like me.”

After the lecture, executives from Apple introduced themselves and hired him on the spot to handle a contentious business dispute.

Jamail died in 2016 after taking more than 500 cases to trial and winning more than \$13 billion in judgments for his clients — not too shabby for a guy who failed torts in law school.

But many people forget that he had other passions, especially military veterans and lawyers giving back to the profession and the community.

A few months after Jamail's death, prominent Houston trial lawyer Richard Mithoff wanted to memorialize his life-long friend's commitment to pro bono and military service.

In 2017, Mithoff had a conversation with Vinson & Elkins partner Harry Reasoner, who was one of Jamail's closest friends and is now the chair of Texas Access to Justice, who suggested setting up an endowment in Jamail's name.

“I wanted to do something more than just creating another award — something that would make a substantive difference in causes that Joe truly believed in,” Mithoff said.



U.S. Marine Joe Jamail

“Joe loved talking about himself and his cases, but he loved even more talking about his experience in the U.S. Marines and his belief in access to justice for everyone, especially those who could not afford it.”

With the assistance of Reasoner and the Texas Access to Justice team, Mithoff created the Joe Jamail Endowment for Veteran Legal Services. The goal was to have \$1 million in the endowment. Mithoff donated the first \$100,000. The Jamail family contributed an additional \$100,000.

In the three years since, the Jamail Endowment has received contributions ranging from \$25,000 to \$100,000 from Robin Gibbs, John Eddie Williams, David Beck, Tom Phillips, Justice Jane Bland and her husband Doug Bland, and Harry and Macey Reasoner. Law firms including Vinson & Elkins, Baker Botts and Norton Rose Fulbright have donated \$10,000 or more.

Mithoff, in an interview with The Texas Lawbook, said he is pleased to announce that the endowment has reached \$1 million.

Because of the Jamail Endowment, Texas Access to Justice has been able to provide legal assistance to more than 8,800 veterans across Texas.

“But the need is still there. In fact, it is increasing,” said Mithoff, who practices with Jamail for many years. “Texas has the second-highest population of veterans in the country. When they are discharged from the military, they are on their own and they face

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Joe Jamail and Richard Mithoff (Photo: Kirk Tuck)

a lot of problems, including housing issues, custody issues, problems with benefits and healthcare disability.”

Reasoner, who worked with Jamail on many high-profile cases including the Pennzoil v. Texaco litigation, said Jamail and his wife were “among the greatest philanthropists in Texas history.”

“Providing civil legal support to Texas veterans is crucial in ensuring they can get back to their lives after serving our country,” Reasoner said.

Reasoner points out that the need to help veterans is so large that it requires multiple sources of funding, including the annual Texas Access to Justice Gala, which raised more than \$4 million, and the Moody Foundation, which contributes \$200,000.

Jamail initially enrolled at the University of Texas in 1942 as a pre-med student, but received five F’s when he failed to show up for his final exams. He forged his father’s name on enlistment documents and joined the Marines. Jamail returned home after the war and returned to UT to get his liberal arts degree and then law degree.

When a classmate bet him \$100 that he couldn’t pass the bar exam during his second year of law school in 1952, he accepted the challenge and scored 76. The passing grade was 75.”

“Shit, I’m overeducated,” he told his friends. “We used the \$100 to buy a lot of beer and got drunk by the lake.”

Jamail’s first courtroom victory came while he was still in law school. A waitress at one of his favorite bars had cut her hand trying to open a bottle of beer. So Jamail and his classmates sued the beer’s bottling company.

“None of us knew what the hell we were doing,” says Jamail. “The thing was, the other side and the judge also knew we didn’t know what we were doing. Fortunately, the beer company offered us \$750 to settle the case. We took it and ended up spending it all at the bar that night drinking.”

To contribute to the Joe Jamail Endowment for Veteran Services, please go to [teajf.org](http://teajf.org).